

Northbrook, Ill. – U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk and Richard Hirschhaut, Director of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, today asked all Midwest Holocaust survivors and their immediate family members to join an international effort to open the Holocaust archives in Bad Arolsen, Germany.

Last year, the 11 members of the International Commission of the International Tracing Service passed amendments to the 1955 Bonn Accords, allowing researchers access to millions of pages of Holocaust archives and transferring digitalized copies to each member nation. However, the amendments must be ratified by each member state—several European nations are currently silent on opening the archives.

“For more than 60 years, Holocaust survivors, their families and historians have been denied access to Nazi archives,” Kirk said. “Europe has a moral imperative to give survivors access to the archives immediately.”

Kirk, co-chair of the Taskforce on Anti-Semitism in the House, is leading a congressional effort to pressure European nations to approve opening the archives, which include millions of records on ghetto life, deportations, labor camps, death camps and post-war displacement.

In the wake of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust denial conference in December 2006, Kirk joined U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) in recruiting nearly 50 members of Congress to send letters to several ambassadors urging immediate action. Since then, Great Britain, Poland and the Netherlands ratified the amendments.

“My family and I should have access to these records so the world can know what happened to my mother, Hela, and 36 of my relatives in Poland,” said Amos Turner of Highland Park. “I want to thank Congressman Kirk for helping us counter the Iranian Government’s campaign to deny the Holocaust.”

“It is unacceptable that government officials have kept the lid on vital information about the deeds of the most evil murderers for more than 60 years,” added Walter Reed, a Holocaust survivor and Wilmette resident.

In March, Hastings and Kirk introduced a resolution urging other European nations to ratify the amendments. In response, Germany and Luxembourg said they would ratify before the International Tracing Service Commission meets again in May.

Kirk and Hirschhaut are asking all Holocaust survivors or immediate family members in the Midwest to sign a letter to the ambassadors of the remaining European nations—France, Belgium, Italy and Greece. Kirk will deliver the letters to each ambassador in Washington.

“At a time when so many survivors face the deadlines of restitution applications, having access to the archive’s materials will aid survivors in gathering the materials they need for their appeals,” Hirschhaut said. “With access to millions of original Nazi files, the archive will act as a tracing service for survivors and their family members, hopefully providing a small measure of closure with regard to those loved ones lost during one of history’s darkest chapters.”

Hirschhaut said the opening of the archive will show Germany's continued action toward reconciliation, responsibility and accountability. He also said the records will allow for the continued pursuit of justice against Nazi War Criminals who are currently unknown.

Holocaust survivors or their immediate family members are asked to contact Congressman Kirk’s office at 202-225-4835. A copy of the letter is attached.

May 15, 2007

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

Last year, your government joined 10 other members of the International Commission of the International Tracing Service in signing amendments to the Bonn Accords. These historic amendments allow researchers access to millions of pages of Holocaust archives housed at Bad Arolsen, Germany. However, the amendments must be ratified by the parliament of each member state.

The United States, Israel, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Poland acted on the treaty amendments. Germany and Luxembourg indicated they would ratify before the International Commission's annual meeting in May 2007. Your government, unfortunately, remains silent.

More than 125,000 Holocaust survivors have placed their names in the Registry of Jewish Holocaust Survivors at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. A 1997 study commissioned by the Office of the Prime Minister of Israel estimated that between 80,000 and 100,000 Holocaust survivors lived in Western Europe, and there are an additional 150,000 in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

We, the undersigned, are survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Our loved ones were murdered, our families shattered, our childhoods taken away. Today, we give voice to those forever silenced and we urge your Government to ratify this critical treaty amendment without delay.

Respectfully,